

7. Offer incentives for changed behavior and commit yourself to sharing in the solution. For instance, if you aren't getting your telephone messages promptly, offer to make periodic checks with the person and establish a central message center.

8. Don't allow your own negative feelings, such as sarcasm or anger, to set the tone for your criticism.

9. Show the person that you empathize with his or her problems and feelings.

10. Hold your criticism for the right time and place. No one wants to be criticized—even constructively—in front of peers or friends. Think it through—pick an appropriate time and place and collect your thoughts. Impromptu criticism may mean you'll say things you'll regret later.

11. Start the conversation by saying something good. Everyone has good points—bring those out too.

12. At the end of the meeting reaffirm your support and cooperation.

But there is another, equally important, side to the coin. Chances are you've been on the receiving end of criticism at some time. How do you take what's being said?

First of all, let's change that question from: "How do you take what's being said?" to "How do you listen to what's being said?" The difference is that one word is a difference in attitude; recognizing an error or acknowledging an error does not make you a lesser person.

Of course, the really hard part comes when there was no error to begin with. You're on the receiving end of feedback, criticism, or worse . . . and you were not responsible for whatever went wrong.

Here are Weinsinger's and Lobsenz's guidelines for taking criticism gracefully, whether justified or not:

- Listen carefully to what's said.
- Verify that you understand what changes are being asked for.
- Discuss with the person possible solutions to the issue.

Criticism, feedback, commentaries on the way we do things—call it what you will—they're part of life, at work and at home. How we give or how we take it depends on us. And while nobody's perfect, we can always try.

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